The Himalayan Masters – A Living Tradition By Pandit Rajmani Tigunait, Ph.D

Excerpts from Chapter Nine: Swami Rama of the Himalayas

Seeker: What is the purpose of life?

Swami Rama: The purpose of life is to know yourself at every level. The obstacles that may arise from the physical level of your being can be prevented by living in a holistic manner: eating a balanced diet, practicing yogic exercises, regulating the four primitive urges – eating, sleeping, sex and self-preservation – and going to bed and waking up on schedule.

But after knowing the dynamics of physical well-being and securing it, you come to realize that true happiness does not come from the body: happiness is the creation of the mind. An unhealthy body can create obstacles to achieving peace and happiness, but a healthy body contributes very little to happiness. It is the mind which has to be made healthy, which has to be disciplined and brought under control. Breadth is the key to accomplishing this.

A human being is neither body nor mind alone: a human being is also a breathing being. The body and the mind are held together with the power of the pranic force, and breadth is the major manifestation of that force. As long as people are breathing they are alive, because the breath creates a link between body and mind. The breath works like a customs officer, registering everything that us exported and imported from either side. According to the Upanishads, the breath is like a queen bee.

The degree of health and physical strength you gain by following a holistic lifestyle can be refined and advanced by practicing pranayama. And when seekers are advanced enough to do this, they have the ability to notice subtler causes of disturbances that arise directly from the mind. This is when they must make a commitment to the inward journey – the practice of meditation.

The stream of life is filled with numberless and mysterious currents and crosscurrents, and after making some initial efforts to meditate and noticing a good degree of improvement, students may experience unconscious memories and habit patterns springing up from the depths of the unconscious mind. At this juncture, they cannot escape – nor is there a need to escape – from their own unconscious materials, their *samskaras*. Standing on the firm ground of *vairagya,* non-attachment, and with the help of the systematic practice of meditation and contemplation, they can dive deep within, explore the subtle causes of habit patterns previously unknown to the conscious mind and return to the safety of that firm ground. In this way they attain freedom from their samskaras once and for all. The mind is free from all conscious and unconscious preoccupations. It is like a clear mirror. And in this mirror, *Atman,* is reflected spontaneously.

The knower of truth, those who have completed the entire journey from beginning to end, divide life into three categories: mortal, semi-mortal, and immortal. The body, breath and conscious mind are the mortal part of the human being. At the other end of the spectrum is the soul, the inner Self, which is immortal. In between is the unconscious mind, which is semi-mortal or semi-immortal. The mortal part of our being goes through the constant change of death, decay, and destruction. It is born, and one day it dies. Whatever actions we perform through this mortal part of ourselves – whether physical, verbal, or mental – create impressions in the unconscious mind. They are stored there in the form of samskaras and motivate our mind, senses, and body to undertake more actions.

This vicious cycle never ends unless we apply the techniques of spiritual discipline. This is because at the time of death, when the body and the conscious mind fall apart, human beings are still alive, dwelling in the unconscious mind. And the sanskaras of unfulfilled desires force the unconscious to beg nature to provide them with a new body. And thus human beings go through the process of rebirth.

Once you attain freedom from the samskaras stored in the unconscious, semi-mortal part of your being, however, you realize that you are pure Atman, the eternal Self, which is not subject to either birth or death. Such a realized person is “immortal”.

Seeker: Then is seems that we must work with the subtle, motivating, powerful seeds that remain dormant in the unconscious mind. How, exactly, do we gain from these samskaras?

Swami Rama: Discipline is the answer – discipline with vairagya. No matter which path you follow, no matter which practice you undergo, no matter which tradition you belong to, you need a disciplined mind. A confused mind is not fit to follow any path.

Whether you stay at home and pursue your sadhana or renounce your home, you have to face your deep-rooted samskaras. It takes a long time to get rid of them, so do not be disappointed when you cannot attain freedom during a month-long retreat. Have patience and keep working. Cleansing and replacing the contents of your mind is possible when you follow a systematic path of self-discipline.

Stay away from teachers and preachers who profess to teach spiritually and meditation without teaching discipline. No matter how sound their techniques, unless students are trained to become disciplined it is like sowing seeds in an untilled, barren field. All you really is to look at the totality of your life, set your priorities, and create a bridge between life within and without. Discipline is the bedrock under that bridge.

Seeker: Does one attain the highest goal, Self-Realization, through self-effort, God’s grace, or a combination of both?

Swami Rama: In the final analysis, Self-realization happens through God's grace. However, abandoning self-effort, especially in the early stage of the inward journey, is a big mistake. God's grace is like rain that falls over a vast area without any regard for which particular areas will benefit from it. It rains on the unjust and the just as well. Even after it rains, land that is not permeable and cannot hold water, or land that is infertile or without seeds, remains barren. But a fertile land thrives where seeds have been sown and precautions have been taken to make the best use of the rainfall. Plants grow and flowers bloom. So it is with our own preparedness to receive grace, assimilate it, and benefit from it.

In yogic literature, receiving grace is known as receiving shakti-pata. And this is possible when a student has gone through a period of discipline, austerity and spiritual practice. Shaktipata is the natural unfoldment of divine grace. In order to attain the highest realization, four types of grace have to converge on one point: shastra kripa, the grace of the scriptures, atma kripa, the grace of oneself, guru kripa, the grace of the guru, and Ishvara kripa, the grace of God.

Through shastra kripa, the grace of the scriptures, you gain an intellectual understanding of the higher dimensions of life, become inspired, gather courage to follow the path of light, and overcome your trivial concerns and doubts. The you need atma kripa, the grace of your Self, which takes the form of committing yourself to your practice. Sincerity, regularity, staying away from useless things and useless people, and being strong with one's decision is atma kripa.

Once you have attained these two graces, you are destined to receive guru kripa, the grace of the guru. That is why it is said "When the student is ready, the guru appears". And once when you receive guru kripa, which is totally unconditional (from the standpoint of the guru) Ishvara Kripa, the grace of God, follows automatically. In fact guru kripa itself turns into God's grace.

Behind this fourfold grace there is only one functioning force: karuna, compassion, rhe unconditional love of the Divine for all individual souls. It is an internal and ever-flowing stream of divine compassion that manifests in the form of the fourfold grace and leads sincere seekers to the highest goal.

Seeker: If I study carefully and do my practices sincerely and faithfully, will I receive guidance directly from within? Or are instructions and guidance from a guru in human form necessary?

Swami Rama: You need an external guru in order to attain the guru within. If you do not have one, you may become egotistical, for example, and decide, 'I do not need a guru'. That is ego talking. Or in your search, if you are not careful, you may become too intellectual and ignore your spontaneous intuition. Or you may become too emotional and ignore your reason. Both situations are equally dangerous. So you need a guru, a spiritual instructor who has attained realization while following the path that he or she is teaching you.

Seeker: They say that it is not easy to find a sadguru, a spiritual master. And without a real master, how is it possible to receive true guidance/

Swami Rama: A good student can never meet a bad guru, but the reverse is also true. Similar attracts similar. If for some reason those who are dissimilar meet, the higher force intervenes and drives away those who are not prepared. Do not worry about who is good and who is bad. Increase you capacity. Purify yourself. Acquire the gentle strength within. God will come and say to you, 'I want to enter this living temple that you are'. Prepare yourself for this situation. Remove the impurities, and you will find that those who want to know reality are themselves the source of reality.

Seeker: How do yogis view the phenomenon of death?

Swami Rama: Death is a habit of the body, a necessary change. But while we are alive we don't pay attention to the importance of knowing hot to die at will, nor do we prepare ourselves psychologically for that moment. From the moment of birth we constantly tell ourselves that the objects o the world are real and that our happiness and completion depend on material possessions. But there comes a time when we notice that the material objects we have acquired are drastically changing and falling apart, and that the same thing is happening with our relationships.
We are disappointed with life, and at the same time we become deeply attached to our children and possessions. As old age approaches we are lonely and afraid. We think that death will be painful – but in fact it is not death, it is the fear of death that creates misery for a dying person.
The brain has a limited capacity to sense physical pain, and at a certain point, it becomes oblivious to it. Thus, during death people do not suffer from physical pain as much as they experience psychological pain. S just as we have discovered ways to prepare the expectant mother to have a safe birth and minimize the pain during labor, we must learn the techniques of casting off the body without fear and pain.

Seeker: I was born and raised in a culture in which I was not exposed to meditation or any form of spiritual discipline, and I do not want to disturb my religious faith. Will this prevent me from advancing on the spiritual path?

Swami Rama: It doesn't matter where you were born, or which denomination you belong to. As long as you realize the importance of having a healthy body and a balanced mind, you can start practicing those things which make sense to you. You don't have to abandon your faith or embrace another one. Stay wherever you are. Do not disturb your family or your society.

Practice truth in thought, speech, and action. Love for truth will help you understand what your most urgent problem and concerns are. And soon you will notice that you are not interested in either hell or heaven – you simply want to be happy and peaceful.

In the early stages of your inward journey you begin to work with your body, for it is the tool for achieving both worldly and spiritual wealth. You should practice exercises that

make your body healthy, whether you are Christian, Hindi, Muslim, Jewish or Buddhist. Similarly, breathing exercises do not conflict with any religion.

You also need a system of gathering the power of your senses and withdrawing them from the external world. You must learn how to relax and provide maximum rest for your body, senses and nervous system so that your mind is free from the complaints of your body. This process does not require you to be born in any particular religious or cultural background.

Then comes concentration. At this stage of your inward journey you need to choose an object on which to focus your mind. Make sure that it is intrinsically peaceful and carries the least amount of sectarian baggage.

According to the sages of the Himalayas the best spiritual discipline is the one that helps you gather the means and resources for undertaking a spiritual practice. That is why they designed a holistic lifestyle, which in ancient times was called raja yoga. Simple principles of life – such as practicing non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, moderation in sense activity, non-possessiveness, cleanliness, contentment, tapas (disciplining the body, mind, and senses), the study of genuine scriptures, and faith in a higher truth – are the foundation of holistic living. There are no religious, ethical, moral, or social schools in the world that do not honor these ten principles/

With the help of this simple practice of spirituality (which consists of these ten principles, plus physical exercise, breathing exercises, relaxation, concentration, and meditation) you automatically begin to overcome your doubt and skepticism. You know what you are doing and you know what is helping you. You will notice that your understanding of your religious faith, your family life, and your relationships have improved. You have become a more tolerant and loving human being. That is a great achievement itself.

Afterwards your mind and heart will tell you what should follow next. The [process of gradual transformation and unfoldment is healthy and long-lasting. Depending on your degree of emotional maturity and intellectual understanding, you will aspire to find a spiritual path that is perfect for you. There are many jackets in the market that are attractive and well made, but the best one is one that fits you. This is also the case with a spiritual path and spiritual disciplines.

All lead to the same goal, but the best path is the one that suits you. Manmade cultural and religious institutions need to follow the truth, not the other way around.

Summary Chapter: The Teachings in Perspective

It may seem that the teachings of the sages differ from one another but these differences can be reconciled in one phrase “The truth is One, its faces are many”. In the beginning and intermediate stages of their spiritual unfoldment the sages may have had different experiences, but once they transcended the boundaries of time, space, and the causation and reached the highest state of samadhi they all attained the experience of unitary consciousness, the absolute, non-dual Brahman. And as the ultimate truth revealed itself in all its brilliance and perfection, the sages came to know that that which lies outside us also exists within us. With this experience the knowledge of life here and hereafter, the knowledge of life here and hereafter, the knowledge of manifest and unmanifest, was no longer a mystery.

It was impossible, however, for the sages to communicate this experience to those whose consciousness was still confined to apparent reality. The sages has to find a way to bridge the gulf between their realization of unitary consciousness and the consciousness of ordinary people. So they communicated only the part of their experience that was relevant to the specific place and time in which they were teaching. And to do this they employed the language, symbols, and idioms that were in use at that place and time. Thus differences in the teachings are rooted not in differences in the ultimate experience but in how much of the experience the sages were able to share with their students and the idiom in which they communicated it. These differences in presentation aside, however, all sages speak with one voice when describing the way to attain inner unfoldment: “Be practical!”.

The sages stress the importance of finding out, at the outset of our journey, where we are in our personal evolution, what our pressing needs are, what our resources are, and how much freedom we have to do what we want to do. They all agree that the only way to minimize obstacles on the journey is to make an accurate assessment of our current situation, and then, once we have done this, to follow a systematic path.

First, we need to look at the broad picture of life. Like an iceberg floating in the ocean of cosmic existence, we see only a small portion of our life at any given time. Like little children, we are happy one moment, cranky the next. We are delighted with trivial matters and at the same time frustrated , disappointed, and depressed when we identify ourselves with them. Every pleasure and pain, success and failure, loss and gain affects us in one way or another, and we are tossed about by experiences which have little significance in the larger scheme of things.

We live in to different worlds and have no way of bridging the gulf between them. When we attempt to live in our inner world, we are distracted by worldly concerns. In our outer world, we forget our spiritual goals, and when we remember them we condemn ourselves for our forgetfulness. In the deepest part of our being, however, we know that true happiness comes only from the realization that we are free from the cycle of birth

and death. And we know that that the greatest loss is to fail to reach that place before the body returns to dust.

The scriptures describe many sadhana for overcoming this situation. Some can be followed as we keep ourselves active in the world. Some involve renouncing the world and all world concerns. But whatever path you follow, there are several key points to consider before you embark on the journey.

Start from Where You Are

Before you embark on any journey, you should be familiar with the map of your route and know exactly where you are on the map. How successful you are at reaching the nearest highway depends on how well you know your immediate locale as well as the surrounding terrain. On your spiritual journey, this means that you must know your temperament, your habit patterns, and your principal strengths and weaknesses before you commit to a spiritual practice.

Scrutinize the part of your life that troubles you the most – the fatigue brought on by your job, or anxiety over unpaid bills, for example. You will not be able to escape all your problems, but resolving them is as important as actually undertaking a practice.

Most problems are the result of not fulfilling your worldly duties and obligations, but you will not have the freedom of mind to attend to your spiritual practice until you do. One of the biggest mistakes aspirants make is committing themselves to spiritual practices as a means of escaping from their duties, but if you shun your duties you will have committed yourself to sadhana (spiritual practice) at a level you cannot sustain. This will be counterproductive in the long run.

You will also need to be familiar with your physical capacity. According to the scriptures, the body is the basic instrument for spiritual development. Physical vitality is the key to progressing on the path, but physical pain, disease, and occasional illness are facts of life; they cannot be ignored or dissolved by mere philosophy. So you must design a practice that does not aggravate your physical problems, and vice versa. Begin by working within the limits of your current capacity, and then work toward expanding it.

CHOOSE A PATH

Analyze your temperament and habits to determine your proclivities. This will enable you to choose a specific aspect of yoga for your main focus. If you are an intellectual, then **jnana** yoga (the path of knowledge) will be the most effective for you. If you are emotional, you can transform your emotions into love and devotion and attain union with God by following the path of **bhakti** yoga. If you are healthy and have little interest in studying the scriptures, sharpening your intellect, or purifying your emotions, then the path of **hatha** yoga, under the guidance of a competent yogi, will be most fruitful.

The path of karma yoga (the yoga of selfless action) is suitable for you if you enjoy doing things for others and sharing the fruit of your actions. And if your main interest lies in knowing yourself at every level and awakening the infinite and dormant forces within, then follow the path of **kundalini** yoga.
Regardless of which path you choose, you must begin with a healthy body and a sound mind. For example, if you have a number of beautifully tailored jackets, but are so ill or in such a bad mood that you can't leave your bedroom, these jackets are useless. Similarly, if you know a great deal about spiritual practices and have been given practices by a competent teacher but have pain in your knees or are distracted by memories and hopes each time you sit to meditate, then these practices will have no effect.

Keeping your body and mind in good health requires following a routine of proper exercise, breathing practices, relaxation, and a systematic process of meditation.

Notes from the book **"Living with the Himalayan Master" by Swami Rama**

1. One Absolute without a second is our philosophy.
2. Serving humanity through selflessness is an expression of love, which one should follow through mind, action, and speech.
3. The yoga system of Patanjali is a preliminary step accepted by us for the higher practices in our tradition, but philosophically we follow the advaita system of one Absolute without a second.
4. Meditation is systemized by stilling the body, having serene breath, and controlling the mind. Breath awareness, control of the autonomic nervous system, and learning to discipline primitive urges are practiced.
5. We teach the middle path to students in general, and those who are prepared for higher steps of learning have the opportunity to learn the advanced practices. This helps people in general in their daily lives to live in the world and yet remain above. Our method, for the convenience of Western students, is called superconscious meditation. I am only a messenger delivering the wisdom of the Himalayan sages of this tradition, and whatever spontaneously comes from the center of intuition, that I teach. I never prepare my lectures or speeches, for I was told by my master not to do so.
6. We do not believe in conversion, changing cultural habits, or introducing any God in particular. We respect all religions equally, loving all and excluding none. Neither do we oppose any temple, mosque, or church, nor do we believe building home for God while ignoring human beings. Our firm belief is that every human being is a living institution or a temple.
7. Our members are all over the world, and for the sake of communication we also believe in education. Our graduate program imparts the knowledge given by the sages, thereby fulfilling the inner need of intellectuals.
8. We practice vegetarianism. We teach a nutritional diet that is healthy and good for longetivity.
9. We respect the institution of the family and stress the education of children by introducing a self-training program and not by forcing our beliefs, faiths, and way of life on them.
10. Our trained teachers systematically impart all aspects of yoga relating to body, breath, mind, and individual soul. Awareness within and without is the key, and the methods of expansion are carefully introduced to the students.
11. To serve humanity we believe in examining, verifying and coming to certain conclusions regarding the yoga practices, including relaxation and meditation.
12. Our experiments are documented and published for the benefit of humanity.
13. We believe in universal brotherhood, loving all and excluding none.
14. We strictly abstain from politics and from opposing any religion.
15. Of great importance is the practice of non-violence with mind, action, and speech

Om, Shanti, Shanti, Shanti